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Empowering citizens or mining resources? The contested domain of citizen engagement in professional care services

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ABSTRACT

When studying individual attempts to foster citizen engagement, scholars have pointed to the coexistence of competing rationales. Thus far, however, current literature barely elaborates on the socio-political processes through which employees of professional organizations deal with such disparate considerations. To address this gap, this article builds on an ethnographic study, conducted in the Netherlands between 2013 and 2016, of a professional care organization's attempts to engage local citizens in one of its elderly care homes. To investigate how citizen engagement is 'done' in the context of daily organizing, we followed employees as they gradually created and demarcated the scope for such engagement by approaching citizens as either strategic partners (pursuing 'democratic' rationales) or as operational volunteers (pursuing 'instrumental' rationales). In order to deal with such potentially incongruent orientations, we found that employees used discursive strategies to influence the balance that was struck between competing rationales; either through depoliticization—i.e., the downplaying of incongruities and the framing of disparate considerations as being complementary within the pursuit of a shared, overarching goal—or through politicization, i.e., the active challenging of how their colleagues prioritized one consideration over another. By showing how the successful conveyance of such (de) politicized accounts helped employees either defend or redraw the boundaries of what citizen engagement was (not) about, we contribute to extant theorization by (1) developing a processual approach to studying citizen engagement that (2) is sensitive to organizational politics.

1. Introduction

Promoted as a way to improve the responsiveness of care services that have become too bureaucratized, commercialized or professionalized (Needham, 2008; Nies, 2014), citizen engagement is currently in vogue as a guiding principle for welfare-state reform (Callaghan and Wistow, 2006; Marent et al., 2015). Policy makers have challenged professional care organizations to recalibrate their relationships with citizens, communities and community organizations, stimulating them to see these as partners in the process of designing and delivering care services (Bovaird, 2007; Pedersen and Johannsen, 2016). Nonetheless, concrete attempts at fostering such engagement rarely seem to result in the partnerships that so many policies promise and promote—even when these ambitions are supported by a broad range of actors (Marent et al., 2015; Osborne and Strokosch, 2013). Often intended to boost efficiency (Bovaird, 2007; Fotaki, 2011) or legitimize decisions that have already been made by those in power (Lee and Romano, 2013; Taylor, 2007), such participatory efforts, scholars point out, tend to be more contentious and more complex than advocates sometimes suggest.

Attempting to make sense of the intricate course of events and unexpected outcomes, several authors have drawn attention to the seemingly inherent complexities of participatory processes. First, they have pointed to the elusive meaning of catch-all terms like 'citizen engagement' and 'public participation'—both in the academic literature and in everyday use. Attempting to provide more conceptual clarity, scholars have developed typologies to categorize disparate practices of, and actors' various rationales for, citizen engagement (e.g., Arnstein, 1969; Bovaird, 2007; Marent et al., 2015). Second, scholars have drawn attention to differences between organizations. Research has demonstrated that the organizational context that embeds participatory efforts shapes the resultant position of citizens vis-à-vis decision-making processes (Croft et al., 2016). Third, scholars have shown that different actors—even within a single organizational setting or participatory process—consider different forms of engagement appropriate (Callaghan and Wistow, 2006; Cornwall, 2008; Fotaki, 2011). Although these studies help us appreciate the complexities of citizen engagement, they barely touch on the dynamics that not only surround the practical treatment of such coexisting, potentially competing orientations, but

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also, as a result, shape the manifestation of engagement efforts over time within particular organizational settings.

In order to address this very issue, this article investigates the processes through which employees of a professional care organization made sense of and dealt with competing orientations to citizen engagement. After observing employees' emphases on either 'democratic' or 'instrumental' rationales for such engagement, we have analyzed how actors intermittently depoliticized or politicized the working balance between such disparate orientations in their attempts to shape the character of participatory efforts and, in the process, challenge or reaffirm established management practices within their organization. By building on our ethnographic study, we contribute to extant literature in two ways. First, while earlier studies tend to provide static accounts of participatory processes, we demonstrate the merits of a processual approach to theorizing the social dynamics surrounding competing orientations to citizen engagement. Second, we show that both internal management practices and organizational politics are more than just the 'organizational context' that shapes citizen-engagement efforts (Croft et al., 2016). Instead, organizational politics lie at the very core of participatory processes as they unfold over time. Before turning to our case study of a professional care provider's attempts to engage local citizens, we first ground our power-sensitive processual approach in the extant literature on citizen engagement in planning and delivering care services.

2. Grasping the nature of citizen engagement

While building on different concepts and themes—such as co-production (Ewert and Evers, 2014; Needham, 2008), participatory governance (Durose, 2011) and public participation (Marent et al., 2015; Martin, 2008)—various strands of literature from the fields of healthcare policy, public administration and organization studies share an interest in the changing role of citizens in organizing healthcare and other (semi-)public services. In practice, the boundaries between such different conceptual approaches are ambiguous. Participation, for example, is argued to be an 'infinitely malleable concept [that] can easily be reframed to meet almost any demand made of it' (Cornwall, 2008, p. 269). Similarly, the concept of co-production is said to have 'excessive elasticity' (Needham, 2008, p. 224), lacking a 'dominant, coherent narrative' (Ewert and Evers, 2014, p. 427) as it is applied to a wide range of practices and seen from a variety of perspectives. As such, pinpointing and understanding what exactly is changing in the role of citizens has become a widely stated challenge for scholars, policy makers and practitioners alike.

Attempting to create more conceptual clarity, various scholars distinguish the different rationales behind governments' and provider-organizations' pursuit of citizen engagement (Bovaird, 2007; Martin, 2008; Osborne and Strokosch, 2013). Across the aforementioned literature, a common distinction is made between, on the one hand, 'democratic' rationales for engaging citizens and, on the other hand, 'instrumental' motivations (Bovaird, 2007; Martin, 2008; Osborne and Strokosch, 2013). The former refer to attempts to strengthen citizens' voice, emphasizing their roles in 'democratizing' the process of service planning, design and management, while the latter signify a more instrumental interest in citizen contributions, leading employees to solicit citizens to complement or replace professional services in the areas in which delivery falls short (Bovaird, 2007). Such different rationales suggest different citizen positionings in relation to professional service organizations.

Reflecting on the disparate reasons for pursuing engagement, some scholars critically demonstrate that professional or governmental initiatives are often presented as being 'a contribution to more democracy by empowering citizens [and] emphasizing dialogue' (Marent et al., 2015, p. 831) while eventually serving as a much narrower 'means to an end, to increase the acceptance, quality, and effectiveness of particular programs and services' (Marent et al., 2015) or to support cost-containment measures (Fotaki, 2011). In their study of organizations' use of public deliberation, Lee and Romano emphasize that the literature 'typically assumes that its emergence and growth is functional—that it is a useful way of actually facilitating less hierarchical, more responsive and flexible decision-making […] [but] when scrutinized in more depth, deliberation processes are loosely coupled with decision-making, or even irrelevant to it altogether' (Lee and Romano, 2013, p. 735). In a similar vein, Croft et al. (2016) demonstrate that managers tend to co-opt citizens into managerially framed roles—particularly in organizations with a rational-hierarchical style of management. Instead of assuming the desirability of participatory practices, these accounts demonstrate that we should first empirically assess both how disparate rationales for engaging citizens play out in practice and how they affect citizens' positioning in the organization of care services (Contandriopoulos, 2004; Pedersen and Johannsen, 2016). Consequently, the question of how to understand the everyday work practices in which such different rationales materialize is key and, thus far, under-researched.

3. Coexisting rationales for citizen engagement

In capturing its complexities and often unforeseen or undesired outcomes, several scholars have pointed out that different views on the 'appropriate' domain for citizen engagement—and, accordingly, 'appropriate' participatory practices—tend to coexist (Fotaki, 2011). 'In practice, all of the forms and meanings of participation […] may be found in a single project or process' (Cornwall, 2008, pp. 273–274). Indeed, when citizen engagement means something different to those involved in the same participatory process, this constitutes 'a source of ambiguity, at locality level, about the status of those involved' (Callaghan and Wistow, 2006, p. 2292): with what exactly should citizens (not) be engaged?

To better understand such ambiguity, we must acknowledge that participatory practices are embedded in heterogeneous organizational environments in which people face competing norms, rules, ideals and objectives (Callaghan and Wistow, 2006; Fotaki, 2011). Likewise, citizen engagement is shaped by, and can be at odds with, established organizing principles in public service management. For example, participatory practices are contingent upon and restricted by the particular (e.g., more or less hierarchical) management practices prevailing within an organization (Croft et al., 2016; Pedersen and Johannsen, 2016) while care professionals might also delimit the spaces that are open for 'legitimate' participation (El Enany et al., 2013). Moreover, when trying to engage citizens within a market-based care system, 'making money by capturing customers easily overrules the building of trust-based relationships' (Fotaki, 2011, p. 946). Accounting for these competing principles and orientations draws our attention to the almost inherently contentious nature of any particular approach to citizen engagement (Contandriopoulos, 2004).

As a result, investigating how those involved deal with the contentious nature of citizen engagement and, subsequently, how their responses affect the direction in which participatory processes develop becomes crucial. Generally lacking firm empirical grounding in the day-to-day practices in which citizen engagement gradually unfolds, current literature provides us with a theoretical framework that is limited in its extent to capture such dynamics. Most scholars seem to account for disparate orientations towards engagement by analyzing structural organizational aspects—i.e., by focusing on actors' particular positions within the organizational chart (Durose, 2011; Pedersen and Johannsen, 2016) or by looking at how organizational processes are structured (Callaghan and Wistow, 2006; Croft et al., 2016). El Enany et al. (2013) do provide a temporal perspective on the emergence of different participatory roles, but they only indirectly touch on the competing rationales for engagement that may coexist within a single organization. In short, by providing temporal snapshots that neglect the 'turbulent, dynamic context' (Croft et al., 2016, p. 31) in which

participatory practices are situated, most citizen-engagement studies offer aprocessual accounts and/or fail to grasp the political dynamics through which such engagement materializes.

4. Demarcating a domain for engagement: a socio-political process

How, then, can we shed light on the significance of this 'turbulent, dynamic context' and move beyond static conceptualizations of the relationship between professional organizations and citizens? First, we must refuse to assume the stability of, or agreement about, the concepts people employ when organizing their work, using instead a processual approach to study unfolding negotiations over the meaning and implications of citizen engagement. By viewing acts of organizing (e.g., engaging citizens) as, essentially, 'attempt[s] to order the intrinsic flux of human action, to channel it towards certain ends by generalizing and institutionalizing particular cognitive representations' (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002, p. 567), pursuing citizen engagement becomes about the ongoing processes in which people interactively try to channel disparate notions of what such engagement means—what it is and what it is not—and how this affects the way they go about their work.

Second, we conceptualize attempts to demarcate what citizen engagement is (not) about as instances of boundary work (Gieryn, 1983). As boundaries both distinguish insiders from outsiders and shape their relationships, acting as 'an essential medium through which people acquire status and monopolize resources' (Lamont and Molnár, 2002, p. 168) and therefore become objects of strategic consideration, a focus on boundary work has proven fruitful for studying the relational dynamics of organizational processes. In our study, we focus on both the processes through which employees demarcate different domains for citizen engagement and how they deal with such differences; investigating these as profoundly socio-political processes in which people 'struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality' (Lamont and Molnár, 2002, p. 168). While health-services research commonly takes a boundary work perspective to studying professional jurisdictions (e.g., Powell and Davies, 2012), we contend that boundary-work concepts can also be applied to the study of citizen engagement—illuminating the 'symbolic struggle […] [over] the imposition of specific meanings or perspectives' (Contandriopoulos et al., 2004, p. 1575) within negotiations over citizens' jurisdiction in participatory processes (El Enany et al., 2013).

Third, when investigating processes of citizen engagement, we must recognize that boundaries are multiple and potentially incongruent. Scholars of organizational boundaries have demonstrated that actors employ different types of boundaries when making sense of different aspects of their relationships to others (Hernes, 2004). For example, in their study of flexible organizations, Hirschhorn and Gilmore (1992) speak of authority, task, political and identity boundaries. By distinguishing such different boundaries, this literature sensitizes us to the possibility that employees direct their boundary work at different dimensions when negotiating their relationships with citizens; e.g., some might particularly call into question 'who is in charge of what' (authority boundaries) while others might try to redefine 'who is doing what' (task boundaries) (Hirschhorn and Gilmore, 1992). In such a context, disparate motives for citizen engagement may inform contradictory boundary enactments.

In order to examine their effects on the unfolding of participatory processes, our study focuses on how employees of a professional care organization deal with incongruent boundary enactments as they demarcate the domain for citizen engagement. Drawing attention to how organizational actors make sense of the (dis)connections between competing rationales for engaging citizens, we investigate whether or not they contend that such rationales 'can be combined without undue tensions' (Llewellyn, 1998, p. 43). In short, we show that actors either (1) downplay the contradictory nature of disparate orientations—effacing existing boundaries to present a harmonious state of affairs in which competing rationales are subordinated to a shared, overarching objective—or (2) highlight their incongruous nature and use this to legitimize a struggle over the organization's strategic course. We will demonstrate how such different responses constitute subtle discursive political strategies that have the potential to either politicize or depoliticize (Palonen, 2003) an organization's approach to citizen engagement. Through successful (de)politicization, actors respectively open up or close down spaces for questioning both the treatment of competing rationales and, more fundamentally, the purpose of citizen engagement. Based on our empirical analysis, we contend that investigating the efficacy of such (de)politicizing accounts contributes to our understanding of how participatory processes unfold and why they do (or do not) deliver on their promises of democratization.

In sum, if we are to understand the intricate and emergent qualities of citizen engagement, we must (1) acknowledge its inherently processual nature by recognizing people's socio-political boundary work and (2) understand how competing rationales and contradictory boundary enactments are dealt with when negotiating an 'appropriate' domain for citizen engagement. Such a power-sensitive processual analysis enables us to fill a gap in the extant literature by offering a more practice-based appreciation of citizen engagement and by revealing its political dynamics as actors demarcate citizens' jurisdiction and bargain over its consequences for care-service management.

5. Methodology

By building on an ethnographic case study of the developments surrounding an elderly care home in the rural town of Carville (a pseudonym) as conducted by the first author, this paper investigates how employees of CareOrg (also a pseudonym) negotiated and made sense of their changing relationships to local citizens. Ethnography 'combines an orientation towards subjective experience and individual agency in everyday life with sensitivity to the broader social settings and historical and institutional dynamics in which these emerge or are embedded' (Ybema et al., 2009, p. 7; also see Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012). An in-depth and up-close investigation of the case setting, which stretched over two-and-a-half years, enabled us to illuminate how citizen-engagement practices were gradually shaped in the everyday interactions that unfolded against a backdrop of managerial support (or a lack thereof). The various actors involved held different (power) positions, had disparate conceptions of an 'appropriate' jurisdiction for engaged citizens and pursued contradictory goals.

In particular, our case analysis focuses on the processes through which employees and citizens explored the feasibility of keeping the care home open until its scheduled replacement by smaller-scale facilities several years later. In order to continue daily operations, the organization was forced to rely on the efforts of an increasing number of volunteers. Resonating with their policy imperative of 'creating caring communities', CareOrg's director emphasized that the organization had to increasingly involve local citizens on decisions that potentially affected them while simultaneously tailoring services to meet their particular needs. Exacerbating the urgency of the situation, CareOrg faced an increasingly pronounced incentive to contain costs due to stricter eligibility criteria for public funding, leading to empty rooms in the home and a looming financial deficit. Pursuing the involvement of local citizens for both democratic and instrumental reasons (i.e., for both strengthening citizen voice and containing costs), the developments in Carville provided fertile ground for studying (1) how employees dealt with competing rationales for citizen engagement as these were 'put to discursive effect' (Martin, 2008, p. 51) while (2) allowing us to investigate how emerging participatory efforts challenged, reinforced, and/or were shaped by internal management practices. The particular empirical context in which we study these issues might differ from, for example, government-initiated citizen-engagement programs or from initiatives within different healthcare systems. Still, we believe that the relevance of our findings extends beyond their particular empirical

context. Our case study allows for a process-based and power-sensitive theorization of how organizational actors deal with disparate considerations for engaging citizens—a challenge that has been identified as cutting across service domains and national contexts (e.g., Cornwall, 2008; Fotaki, 2011).

Empirically, we focused on CareOrg managers and policy staff members—the employees directly facilitating the trajectory—as they interacted with citizens and with each other to demarcate 'appropriate' domains for citizen engagement. We draw on three sources of data: (1) observations of employees' meetings with citizens, organized to discuss the situation of the care home and negotiate their respective roles within this situation; (2) observations of 'internal' project meetings, as employees discussed their approaches to citizens; and (3) interviews and conversations in which employees reflected on what they saw as 'appropriate' citizen engagement and its implications for their own work, which also allowed participants to share their perspective on events that occurred during our observations. Combining interviews with observations of in-situ interactions allowed us to move beyond participants' post-hoc justifications of their behaviour, instead witnessing in real time how they actively (re)drew and negotiated the various boundaries that structured employees' and citizens' relationships. Table 1 provides an overview of the data on which this study is based.

5.1. Data analysis

As a first step, we coded those data segments that captured the sayings and doings that contained explicit or implicit references to people's rationales for engaging citizens and the domains to which this engagement should apply. By analyzing the resulting in-vivo codes (e.g., 'citizens should lead', 'don't decide in the boardroom', 'volunteers replace paid jobs', 'professionals retain control') and by moving back and forth between this analysis and the extant literature on boundaries and citizen engagement, we recognized two approaches that each proposed a different type of boundary to be redrawn in the relationship between citizens and employees ('authority' and 'task'). Building on this analysis, we composed an overview of the two dominant orientations to citizen engagement as they emerged from our data: *strategic partnerships* versus *instrumental volunteers* (summarized in Table 2). While these competing rationales resemble those described in the extant literature (e.g. Bovaird, 2007), our ethnographic data allowed us to further elaborate on the socio-political dynamics that emerged from their coexistence. Going back to our data, we coded and analyzed those segments in which employees made sense of and responded to the different orientations prevailing within their organization (e.g., 'healthy tension', 'keeping the right balance' vs. 'fundamental problems', 'putting up a fight'). By organizing and analyzing these segments, we inductively distilled two main responses to the competing orientations to citizen engagement: (1) their portrayal as complementary viewpoints in pursuit of a shared overarching goal or (2) their problematization by identifying a divide between two incompatible orientations. As such, actors respectively *depoliticized* or *politicized* the competing orientations to citizen engagement within their organization. The emergence of (de) politicization as a key theme in our analysis prompted us to study additional literature on the issue and inspired us to further reflect on how employee responses to competing orientations related to the broader political context in which work processes were organized within their organization.

Lastly, in the final stage of our fieldwork, we organized two formal sessions with key stakeholders and conducted several informal discussions with other employees and local citizens to check whether we 'got it right' from their perspectives (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012), using these to further refine our analysis.

Table 1
Overview empirical material.

Data sources	Resulting data
45 meetings observed (mostly audio recorded) ● 15 internal CareOrg meetings 13 with Carville project team 1 with logistics department 1 policy staff member's 'good-bye party' ● 30 meetings with local citizens/ stakeholders 4 open-to-all public meetings 18 citizen/employee working-group meetings 1 with civil-society organizations 3 with both citizens and professional third parties 4 with residents' family and/or volunteers	38 h of audio recording (selectively transcribed); field notes[a]
16 audio-recorded interviews and conversations ● 13 individual interviews, 3 group interviews (2–4 people) ● 4 interviews with (in total 3 different) citizens ● 14 interviews with (in total 9 different) employees, including: 1 social care worker (1 interview) 3 policy staff members (8 interviews) 3 local and regional managers (3 interviews) 2 central-management team members (4 interviews)	9 h of audio recording (fully transcribed); field notes[a]
38 days on site (ranging from 4-h visits to overnight stays) ● Numerous informal conversations, mainly before and after meetings ● Extensive 'hanging out' before and after meetings, observing employees' everyday work	Extensive field notes[a]

[a] Transcripts and notes together comprised 154,338 words.

6. Two disparate orientations to citizen engagement

6.1. Pursuing democratic governance: engaging citizens as strategic partners

In Carville, the first dominant orientation to citizen engagement we encountered highlighted local citizens' potential role as strategic partners within the care home's situation. Promoted by the official policy discourse and the CareOrg leadership, this approach suggested that boundaries delineating who could legitimately take part in decision-making processes needed to be redrawn. Rooted in a wider idea that 'care homes can be patronizing' *(policy advisor, meeting transcript)* and that 'people know very well how they want to live their lives' *(nurse, interview transcript)*, proponents of this view regularly stressed the need to 'make more space for others to participate' (*general director, meeting notes*), sometimes explicitly refusing to delimit the scope of citizen involvement:

> We're not going to tell them [citizens] what this master plan will look like […], they should be in the lead instead!
>
> *(Policy staff member, meeting transcript)*
>
> [In discussion with local managers:] Our starting point is to never say 'no' to any request from town.
>
> *(Director, meeting notes)*

Enforcing the notion of citizens as strategic partners, the management team appointed a senior staff member to support local citizens in creating a 'local infrastructure', enabling them to not only mobilize people, but also to articulate a shared voice and to play a role in local governance issues:

> They should become a group that starts to take things over, to do things and want things […], forming a proper mouthpiece as partners in the discussions within this trajectory. They should

Table 2
Two orientations to citizen engagement.

	Citizens as strategic partners	Citizens as operational volunteers
Reason for change	Current situation is patronizing	Current situation is unaffordable
Type of reconstructed boundary	Authority boundaries (who is in charge of what?)	Task boundaries (who is doing what?)
Domain of engagement	Decision-making, governance	Operational work processes
Trajectory's governance model	Egalitarian: bottom-up, start with blank slate	Hierarchical: Top-down, strong management, clear conditions
Main measure for success	Citizens 'in control' of local services	Cost containment

organize themselves within all these plans being made.

(Policy staff member, interview transcript)

By treating local governance as a core domain for citizen engagement, employees acknowledged that traditional boundaries of authority had blurred, compromising their own abilities both to 'decide ahead of time what things will look like' *(regional manager, meeting transcript)*. Instead of 'formulating SMART objectives, which is what we normally want' *(policy staff member, meeting transcript)*, CareOrg staff stated the need to be 'more modest' about the extent to which they were 'in control' of work processes and refrain from 'making unilateral decisions about the future of the town's care services' *(general director, meeting notes)*. In short, motivated by a desire to strengthen local citizens' positions in the governance of services, employees would often challenge the boundaries that had previously made decision-making processes an exclusively professional domain.

6.2. Seeking instrumental contributions: engaging citizens as operational volunteers

Among employees, we identified a second, concurrent dominant orientation to citizen engagement. Instrumentally approaching them as a source of labour, employees saw citizen involvement as a potential substitute for the paid work that had become unaffordable in the wake of public funding cuts. Emphasizing the need to downsize CareOrg's professional workforce, staff members explored options to replace some of the work done by paid staff with local volunteers. To reconstitute an 'appropriate' division of labour between staff and volunteers, CareOrg's HR department began analyzing which job titles within the organization could, potentially, be replaced by volunteers. Moreover, the logistics manager mentioned that his department was 'exploring which volunteer activities could save us most money' *(logistics manager, meeting transcript)*. Indeed, his supervisor stressed that the added value of citizen engagement 'is only effectuated when we reorganize and let go of paid staff' *(logistics director, meeting notes)*. Evidenced, in part, by the fact that participatory practices were referred to as a way of 'mining resources' *(manger, meeting transcript),* citizen engagement was mainly seen as a means to realize the cost-containment that was deemed necessary for the care home's survival.

While treating citizens as operational volunteers suggested a shift in 'who is doing what' (i.e., task boundaries), established boundaries of authority were not fundamentally questioned as it involved a less profound alteration of employees' own roles in managing services. Highlighting CareOrg's ongoing responsibility for its daily operations, the logistics manager noted that: 'We'll need a really good policy and strong management of volunteers to make sure we continue to meet quality standards' *(logistics manager, interview transcript)*. After identifying how many volunteers were needed and for which activities, employees subsequently monitored these numbers to see if citizen engagement would pay off—i.e., save money and contribute to the care home's survival. Throughout this process, instances were noted in which employees suggested 'applying pressure' to local citizens in an effort 'to stimulate the influx of volunteers' *(logistics manager, meeting transcript)*. On the whole, citizen engagement was regularly presented as being a logistical operation, one that required enough volunteers to safeguard the continuation of CareOrg's service provision without questioning CareOrg's position of being 'in charge'.

7. Dealing with disparate orientations to citizen engagement

7.1. Depoliticizing differences: effacing boundaries in pursuit of an overarching goal

With such democratic and instrumental rationales existing side by side, we focused on how CareOrg employees made sense of, and dealt with, situations in which these orientations suggested contradictory courses of action. While employees acknowledged that, when considered in isolation, the pursuit of either rationale was legitimate, there was, at times, a clear trade-off between the two. As a result, the coordination of competing rationales was often stated as one of the core challenges in engaging citizens:

> The art is to—and this is our dilemma—to think like a business and along institutional lines with one half of your brain, while at the same time trying to let go, to truly let go [as citizens take on their own roles]
>
> *(Regional manager, meeting transcript)*

Statements like these depoliticized the differences between such disparate rationales. While differences were not denied, employees essentially effaced any sharp distinction between the two rationales, framing democratic and instrumental considerations as two sides of the same coin in pursuit of a shared, overarching goal: to provide financially sustainable care services over which citizens experience an increasing degree of ownership.

> It's also a healthy tension. […]. Somebody needs to critically look at this from a financial point of view and from a quality-of-care perspective […]. If you don't create that tension in your organization, then you're at risk of making one aspect too prominent.
>
> *(General director, interview transcript)*

> We all have a central aim and that's the client—who should be able to continue living here. But then, as a company, we also have a financial interest. […] For other colleagues with a [different] perspective, money isn't their main interest, they want people to have a say and to have ownership. […] We're in an ongoing dialogue, […] and normally we end up somewhere in the middle. I believe those are the best solutions.
>
> *(Logistics manager, interview transcript)*

Instead of employing strict boundaries and highlighting the incommensurability of these disparate orientations, employees downplayed any fundamental differences, preferring instead to portray the tension between democratic and instrumental rationales as being functional and desirable. CareOrg's director stressed that the heads of the various departments were tasked with safeguarding 'their' particular sub-interests and that, in light of the organization's core mission, all of these sub-interests needed to align. Taking such a functionalist perspective, dealing with competing orientations was actually evidence of—and integral to—good management.

7.2. Politicizing differences: emphasizing incompatibility

What such depoliticizing accounts concealed—intentionally or

not—was opposition. Those that opposed the dominant paradigm did not always 'just' strive to protect their particular sub-interest within the larger whole, they also tried to challenge the status-quo within their organization. While participatory governance and cost savings were both recognized as valid objectives, CareOrg employees still came to different conclusions about the relative importance of such considerations and how they needed to be dealt with.

> Within our internal project team, there's Matilda, who thinks from a care perspective. Whereas we think logistically. And those are different things. […] She always questions whether people have enough choice and a say in what we offer […] while we tell clients that they have to purchase [these extra services]. […] We always stress the financial side of things.
>
> *(Logistics manager, conversation transcript)*

Investigating how employees dealt with such different positions and perspectives, we observed a second dominant response: some employees made sense of differences in a more overtly political way. Refuting the harmonious portrayal of complementary viewpoints, these employees would challenge the self-evident and collective character of the 'common goal' to which competing sub-interest were subordinated.

> Our strategic compass [CareOrg's official mission statement] was very much our director's compass.
>
> *(Policy staff member, interview transcript)*
>
> [The logistics manager] thinks this is one big joke—that we're crazy for doing this as an organization.
>
> (*Policy staff member, interview transcript*)

Indeed, there was a lack of consensus regarding CareOrg's overarching mission. Each using different standards for striking the 'appropriate' balance between competing considerations, employees explicitly challenged the extent to which other colleagues neglected citizens' voices or, alternatively, accepted a financial deficit. While the general director consistently presented democratic and instrumental rationales as being complementary, he did admit that 'it was often a struggle to make sure that money was not the sole consideration' (*general director, interview transcript*). Trying to redefine the primacy of one perspective over another, employees actively (re)politicized their disparate viewpoints as they distanced themselves from alternative orientations as well as the allegedly shared goals that were used to legitimize how competing orientations were being aligned.

In what follows, we present a narrative to illustrate how employees in and around Carville oscillated between depoliticizing and politicizing accounts over time and, as a result, effectively shaped what was considered a 'legitimate' approach to citizen engagement within their organization.

7.3. (De)politicizing accounts in practice: keeping the care home open?

The care home's precarious situation left employees with a conundrum: could they keep the care home open in order to meet citizens' voiced interests while simultaneously attracting enough volunteers to reduce CareOrg's financial deficit to an acceptable level? Notably, the definitions of 'enough' and 'acceptable' were highly debated.

> When times were better we made a profit, so you could argue that it's justifiable to invest when times are harder. […] But it's all a matter of how you value these things; others might do it differently.
>
> *(General director, interview transcript)*

When a management conflict over the strategic course of the organization started to escalate, this specific struggle became particularly apparent. Initially, the general director seemed successful in depoliticizing the tension between citizens' voices and financial considerations (calling it a 'healthy tension' within the pursuit of a shared 'overarching goal'). Eventually, however, the divide between democratic and instrumental orientations ultimately got re-politicized. CareOrg's medical staff, which until then had barely been involved with the developments in Carville, began protesting the alleged 'overarching goal' that repeatedly stressed was by the director, i.e., his attempts to keep the organization's rural-based care homes open, including the one in Carville.

> The doctors say this policy is no good—they claim it's not good for the elderly, they suffer from it, and say 'we're here to protect them and oppose this policy'.
>
> (*Policy staff member, interview transcript*)

The medical staff portrayed the organization's official strategic course as being irreconcilable with what they considered 'good care', choosing to explicitly politicize the decision to keep the care home in Carville open. In what employees called a 'classic power struggle' (*policy staff member, interview transcript*), underpinned by different understandings of the organization's core objectives, the medical staff approached local media to share their concerns and announce their lack of confidence in the director, ultimately leading to his resignation.

While the medical staff's critique did not primarily revolve around the organization's approach to citizen engagement, their opposition to CareOrg's central policy increased the efficacy of other actors' opposition that until then were neutralized as being 'the other side of the coin'. This significantly affected the dynamics of how competing orientations were handled within the organization. Following the director's resignation, an interim director quickly initiated a process of 'strategic reorientation'.

> Soon, we'll all be clear on what our organization is about, what we invest in and to which things we say: 'we need to clean this up, because we're losing money and don't see any viable potential'.
>
> (*Board member, meeting transcript*)

Indeed, CareOrg's core mission, which up until then had been coined as 'creating caring communities', was soon redefined as 'providing care and treatment', signalling the return to a more medical approach to care provision. Employees saw this as a considerable shift that changed both the extent to which local citizens' voices mattered and the extent to which they should be included in decision-making processes around the care home. As this process continued, distinctively instrumental motives for engaging citizens became more pronounced:

> [It used to be] about collaboration, about togetherness, about opening up to the needs and desires of the community. […] Now you hear colleagues saying: why don't you develop this programme for the volunteer caregivers, because we're still doing too many things that they should be doing.
>
> *(Policy staff member, conversation transcript)*

Approximately six months after the former management had announced that the care home would stay open, the new management decided to shut it down in an effort to 'clean up' the facilities where money was being lost. Just as the former director had defended his decision to keep the facility open, the decision to close the facility was equally presented as the outcome of a (non-political) balancing act between, on the one hand, the imperative to respond to local citizens' needs and, on the other hand, to safeguard the organization's financial continuity.

> The desire to invest in local communities is still in our genes, but doing so in this case has become impossible. We really tried to find a solution to continue service provisions, but everything we tried turned out to be futile.
>
> (*Interim director, meeting transcript*)

Whereas the previous director had come to the conclusion that honouring citizens' voiced interests outweighed the importance of CareOrg's compromised financial status (stating that it was 'justifiable to invest when times are harder'), the organization's redefined core mission allowed the interim director to consider the same competing issues and arrive at an opposite conclusion. As a result, the care home was closed and the citizens that had initially been engaged to prevent 'unilateral decision-making' were only informed about the decision several months after it had been made.

In sum, reflecting on these developments in Carville, we found that CareOrg employees engaged in two forms of boundary work. First, we witnessed them negotiating the parameters of citizen engagement by redefining 'who is in charge of what' (authority boundaries) and/or 'who does what' (task boundaries). Second, we observed employees reconstructing the boundaries between such competing orientations and the overarching goals against which these were subordinated—either depoliticizing their alignment and neutralizing opposition by highlighting their complementary nature under a shared, overarching objective, or, alternatively, (re)politicizing this broader policy imperative and, as a result, challenging the extent to which colleagues either neglected citizens' voices or accepted a financial deficit. By negotiating boundaries on these different levels, employees gradually shaped how concrete attempts at citizen engagement materialized and, in the processes, potentially reconstructed the political context in which their daily work was embedded.

8. Discussion

In this article, we have approached citizen engagement as a contentious organizational process. While resonating with earlier studies that highlight participatory efforts' contingencies on established management practices (Croft et al., 2016; Pedersen and Johannsen, 2016) and professional jurisdictions (El Enany et al., 2013), we contribute to the literature in at least two ways.

First, we have introduced a processual perspective for investigating the dynamics of citizen engagement that explicitly accounts for the emergent and contested nature of participatory efforts. Some scholars have provided a temporal perspective on the emergence of different participatory roles (El Enany et al., 2013), but only indirectly touched on the competing rationales for engagement that may coexist within a single organization. Others have addressed the competing rationales for citizen engagement, but failed to empirically or theoretically explore how such rationales are dealt with as participatory processes unfold. Bovaird (2007) study, for instance, shows the relevance of such an analysis by demonstrating that professionals tend to prefer citizens in a more operational, service-delivery role while citizens themselves prefer a more strategic governance role. Similarly, Pedersen and Johannsen (2016) show that managers are generally more negative about participatory practices than front-line workers—particularly in more hierarchically structured organizations. Accordingly, while extant literature tends to pinpoint the democratic or instrumental nature of a particular participatory programme or an individual actors' approach, our study adds to this line of research by considering how such disparate positions and orientations interact and, in the process, shape the character of citizen engagement. By demonstrating how organizational actors actively balance competing 'democratic' and 'instrumental' rationales, and defend (or challenge) the particular balance that is struck by themselves (or others), our study helps explain how actors negotiate different boundaries (Hirschhorn and Gilmore, 1992; Lamont and Molnár, 2002) and competing rationales (Bovaird, 2007; Fotaki, 2011) for engaging citizens, and how this in turn shapes the direction in which these processes unfold.

Zooming in on such strategic manoeuvring, and moving to our second theoretical contribution, we contend that organizational politics are at the very heart of participatory practices. Previous studies have already highlighted the importance of viewing issues of power and control as the organizational context in which citizen engagement takes shape (Croft et al., 2016; Fotaki, 2011). Croft et al.'s (2016) comparison of three participatory processes, for instance, provides valuable insights regarding the key role of the management context in which such processes are embedded. Our study contributes to these studies by capturing the dynamics through which participatory practices are negotiated and constituted over time. By investigating these dynamics, we have shown that citizen engagement should not be treated as something that takes place in the margins of an organization, at the periphery, or as if 'internal' organizational politics constitute its 'external' context. In that vein, our attention is drawn to two ways in which organizational politics form more than a mere 'context' and in which the active getting/defending/challenging of power and political interests becomes, in fact, an integral part of participatory efforts. First, some orientations to citizen engagement embody a direct critique of established management practices; e.g., attempts to strengthen citizens' voice in decision-making processes inherently challenge established boundaries of authority and compromise the ability of both managers and professionals to be 'in control' of service planning and delivery. As such, quarrels over 'legitimate' forms of citizen engagement cannot be seen as separate from managers' and professionals' broader perspectives—including their own positions and interests—on how care services should be managed.

Second, apart from such direct critiques, participatory efforts also engender more subtle political action as actors make sense of, and practically deal with, competing rationales for engaging citizens. By framing competing viewpoints as being 'two sides of the same coin', successful depoliticization can neutralize more fundamental critiques to citizen engagement by discursively narrowing the space in which actors can challenge the organization's strategic course (Palonen, 2003). In contrast, politicization can open up such space and explicitly question the alleged 'shared' objectives that guide the balancing of competing orientations. In our case study, initial challenges to the leadership's emphasis on democratic rationales were successfully neutralized through depoliticization. Later, however, opposition by more powerful actors within the organization proved much more efficacious. Doctors effectively politicized the organization's strategic course towards citizen engagement and, as a result, drastically altered the political dynamics within the organization. By investigating the efficacy of actors' (de) politicizing accounts, we reveal the subtle political manoeuvrings that help explain why particular orientations to citizen engagement prove more or less prominent as participatory processes unfold. Theoretically, the rhetorical strategy of depoliticization—by which sharp distinctions in organizational actors' disparate interests are obscured in favour of allegedly shared (but often managerially-defined) objectives—also resonates more broadly with critical studies of, for example, teamwork (e.g., Finn et al., 2010).

Given that our study focused on how employees negotiated the nature of citizen engagement, we have not been able to do justice to the dynamics that emerged from the even more heterogeneous group of citizens that decided (not) to participate in the trajectory. Any reference to a 'community', 'public' or 'group of citizens' that is involved in such processes inherently conceals a tremendous diversity of perspectives, interests and positions (Contandriopoulos et al., 2004; Martin, 2008). Adding even more perspectives and interests to the equation that are worth considering, such diversity, although beyond the scope of this paper, further increases the complexity of a professional organization's attempts to reconstitute its relationship with citizens. We consider this a fruitful direction for future research.

9. Conclusion

This article has presented a power-sensitive processual approach to help explain why advocates struggle to deliver on promises of citizen engagement and why such engagement is vulnerable to being watered down or overpowered by the competing interests and principles that

guide actors who organize care services. Although it has been claimed that 'citizens have […] replaced gods and monarchs as the final source of political authority' (Contandriopoulos et al., 2004, p. 1580), our study highlights such authority's limitations. Ensuring the serious consideration of citizen input requires ongoing efforts to depoliticize the extent to which their engagement compromises other (e.g., professional, logistical or financial) considerations. While the tension between such competing considerations has often been identified in the extant literature (Croft et al., 2016; El Enany et al., 2013; Fotaki, 2011), we illuminate the dynamics through which alternative considerations are either effectively aligned with the pursuit of citizen engagement or, alternatively, through which citizen input is eventually co-opted or undermined.

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